



The Petting Zoo



spiders

petting

zoo

11 0 1

Chapter 1 by Neolillz

At first Johnson thought it was a joke. Speeding down the country road the crude sign was only a blur. But it was that one word. Slowing down, he swung the Lexus onto the paved shoulder. In the rearview mirror, he could see it clearly. The sign was tacked to a stick that was stuck in the ground just beyond the paved shoulder.

Shifting the powerful car into reverse, Johnson jammed the accelerator down. The tires squealed and loose gravel flew as he tore back up the road. Screeching to a halt, Johnson stared at the faded handwriting:

ELSWORTH'S FAMOUS
SPIDER PETTING ZOO
5Ms Next RT

Spiders fascinated Johnson. One summer, when he was eight, a large gold and black spider had taken up residence underneath the shingles by the back door. Every morning, Johnson would gather up ants in a jar from a nest in the garden. One by one, he would drop the wriggling insects

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With lightning speed, the spider would spring from her hiding place and race towards the victim. Sinking her fangs into the ant, she would retreat, waiting for the poison to take effect. When the ant slowly stopped struggling, she would climb back down and delicately wrap her prey in a white shroud.

This continued until, one day, his mother caught him. "What a cruel little boy you are," she scolded between clenched teeth as she pummelled his backside. He could still feel the shame of being spanked.

Years later, in a rare moment of remorse, Johnson wondered what it was like for the ant. Trapped...helpless...waiting for the spider to return. Did they know fear or horror? Or was that something only humans experienced? The insect brain was too small he told himself. Or so he hoped.

Five miles, thought Johnson, This side trip might only add another half hour or so to his journey. He would still have time once he got to his motel to have a shower. The dinner meeting with the buyer from the supermarket chain wasn't until 6 o'clock and it was only 4 now.

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